

At Issue: appropriateness of pediatric LASIK

Q: *At Issue* posed the following question to a panel of experts: "Under what circumstances, if any, should a person under age 18 have LASIK?"

A: **Beneficial under special circumstances**

Noel A. Alpins, MD, FACS: The circumstances existing for children considering refractive surgery are usually quite different than those encountered for adults. Although the common theme is freedom from wearing specta-

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cles, the initiating factors in children are usually binocular vision problems or psychosocial priorities.

Under the age of 10, significant anisometropia and contact lens intolerance might require surgical intervention by unilateral lens or LASIK surgery in appropriate circumstances. For those older than 10, special circum-

stances might exist when bilateral surgery would be warranted.

This is best appreciated if I give an example from my own practice. An intelligent 14-year-old girl was brought in by her father for laser vision correction for a significant anisometropic, myopic and astigmatic error.

Her mother, with whom she was close, had died some 2 years before, and she was being ostracized by her school peers for her very ordinary appearance and her thick spectacles, causing her psychosocial distress. She loved sports, particularly horseback riding, but as she was not successful in contact lens wear, she was prevented from full participation. The impact on her psyche was significant from all these contributing factors.

Preliminary assessment included a second opinion from an experienced and respected colleague in our area and informed consent signed by both father and daughter together. After medico-legal guidance and after an interview, a future liability waiver was given by the girl to her father. Psychological assessment was not deemed necessary.

Surgery on each eye was performed

1 month apart, and it was understood by all that because of likely progression, a secondary surgery could be required after 21 years of age.

The support and guidance to this girl by her sole parent, her father, was well founded, and a very significant turnaround was achieved in all aspects of her personality and performance. Where special indications are well investigated and the situation is psychosocially warranted, a great deal of benefit can be derived for minors with significant refractive errors. 